

# Outreach Insider



News, ideas, and information  
on NRCS Outreach initiatives  
and projects in Illinois

USDA

Natural Resources Conservation Service

November 2000

## Outreach Message:



**Bill Gradle**

State Conservationist

The year 2000 is coming to a close. It doesn't seem that long ago that we were anxiously gearing up for the big millennium celebration, and here we are already humming along in fiscal year 2001. I think this is an appropriate time of year to look back on our outreach accomplishments here in Illinois. As I've said before, our agency has essentially been doing outreach since our earliest beginnings. But now more than ever I feel we've established a better grasp of what outreach is, and what outreach can be here at NRCS. You have all done a great job capturing the projects you've done and have made a more earnest effort to reach out, up, down, and across—doing whatever it takes to make contact and meet the needs of those private landowners that we may have overlooked in the past.

What does 2001 hold for outreach? What new initiatives and nontraditional natural resource solutions will unfold in the coming months and years? The answer lies within all of us. There will always be another untackled issue, a pressing problem, a new "wrinkle," or a surprising opportunity that either sneaks up on us or is dropped suddenly in our lap. And there are always staff members who think "out-of-the-box" and come up with new ways to look at an old problem or who use our old time-tested ideas on a new crowd.

I look forward to seeing what Illinois' conservation professionals will dream up this next year! If I had a wish list for the holidays it would be that NRCS is given the support and the funding we need to put all your incredible ideas and projects on the ground.

Happy holidays!

*Willie J. Gradle*  
Illinois State Conservationist

## What is Outreach?

Outreach is a way of conducting business that ensures underserved individuals and groups throughout the United States and its territories are made aware of, understand, and have a working knowledge of USDA programs and services. Outreach will ensure that these programs and services are equitable and made accessible to all.



What's  
Happening  
in Illinois—

## Manual High School Successful

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Prairie Rivers RC&D, and USDA Forest Service are partnering to provide technical and financial assistance to Manual High School (Peoria, IL) to help the school realize a long-term dream.

The Peoria Manual High School project started out with an unusable greenhouse attached to the side of the school. However, through the many partnerships that have been formed, students and teachers at the high school will eventually have a functional greenhouse. The much needed financial support for the project came through grants from the U.S. Forest Service, Illinois State Board of Education, Peoria School District 150, and a host of local community businesses.



Michele Giovannini and Warren Rayford, USDA-ARS explaining the function of an automated heating, cooling, and lighting systems in an ARS greenhouse (Peoria).



Mike Miller, Peoria Park District, explaining the historical significance of prairies in Illinois and showing native prairie areas in Forest Park.

The two primary goals of the project are to initiate a curriculum teaching horticulture, and introduce students to alternative natural resource career paths in the public and private sectors. In addition, the school plans to provide a curriculum connection involving other subject areas (including History, Chemistry, Biology, and English Literature).

Planned activities for students include landscaping the schools' property, propagating native prairie plants for the Midewin Tall Grass Prairie (Joliet, IL), as well as a field trip to the Midewin Tall Grass Prairie.

On October 11, 2000 a tour that included the USDA-ARS greenhouse in Peoria and several local prairies helped five involved teachers to better understand the project and helped to develop additional partners for the overall project.

On the tour Hal Gardner, USDA Agriculture Research Service, explained the various types of plants in the Irene M. Cull



Linda Prescott, Wildlife Prairie Park, sharing information about how to set up a native prairie outdoor classroom and showing the teachers the native prairie identification garden in Wildlife Prairie Park.

Prairie. Mike Miller, Peoria Park District, helped the teachers to understand the historical significance of prairies in Illinois and showed them some of the native prairie areas in Forest Park. Linda Prescott, Wildlife Prairie Park, shared information about how to set up a native prairie outdoor classroom and showed the teachers the native prairie identification garden in Wildlife Prairie Park.

This effort will undoubtedly open the door of opportunity to many urban students who would not otherwise consider careers with USDA or in agriculture. Additionally, it will raise the students level of awareness for prairies in rural and urban settings.

## Outreach Across State and Agency Lines

Michele Gidcumb, District Conservationist for Gallatin/Hardin Counties was the luncheon speaker at the Bayou Grill in New Harmony, Indiana, as part of Gray Estates Farm tour on Saturday, September 30. The Gray family owns thousands of acres in several counties in Illinois and Indiana. Sixty-five family members extending, geographically, from California to New York, and chronologically, from 18 to 90+ years old attended the tour. The Gray Estates Farm tour was sponsored by the Locust Street Company, Incorporated of Evansville, IN, which is a farm management firm. Many of the family members only visit the farm every other year to attend the tour. This was an opportunity to market USDA / Natural Resources Conservation Service programs to a non-traditional group, as most of the families live in urban areas. They were very interested in protecting natural resources on the farm, and especially in soil stewardship and water quality.

Michele worked cooperatively with the Indiana NRCS and SWCDs to deliver the message of NRCS conservation programs and Best Management Practices. Thanks to the Illinois Public Affairs staff for providing printed materials for distribution to the tour participants. After speaking at the luncheon, Michele and the Indiana staff made themselves available for questions on the various tour stops in Illinois and Indiana to see conservation tillage and best management practices at work on the farm.

Because the tour was on a Saturday, Michele was working in an unofficial capacity. But this was an opportunity to market NRCS conservation programs to non-traditional customers and a good example of outreach across state and agency lines.

## Outdoor Stewardship Days Held for Students

On Wednesday, October 4th & Thursday, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2000 the Lee & Ogle County Soil & Water Conservation Districts hosted the Third Annual Outdoor Stewardship Days at Lowell Park in Dixon. Approximately 1150 third grade students and 100 teachers / chaperones from 23 Lee and Ogle schools attended. The day was designed to give the students the opportunity to learn about different aspects of dealing with our natural resources.

Students attended six of twenty-six sessions throughout the day. Sessions included, but were not limited to, forestry, water resources, spiders, wildlife management, and soil erosion. Every class received an opportunity to attend the Activity Tent to make a Wood Cookie Necklace, donated by Lyle Reuter, and participate in natural resource activities.



Presenters for the day were from various agencies including, Lee County Health Department, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Lee and Ogle Extension offices, Lee and Ogle County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Dixon Park District and Lee County Solid Waste Management. There were several volunteers from Lee County Natural Area Guardians and various Soil and Water Conservation Districts that assisted with the festivities.

KSB Hospital was available again this year, and provided a first aid tent for both days.

Funding for the event was made possible by a grant from the Illinois Department of



Natural Resources through the Conservation 2000 program. The Lee County Pheasants Forever chapter provided a donation for educational materials. C-2000 grants are awarded annually to applicants for the promotion of natural resource, education, conservation, protection, and habitat enhancement. The grant funds were utilized to purchase a bag and a Track Finder for each student. The bags were filled with education materials provided by Farm Service Agency, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Pheasants Forever, The University of Illinois Extension, and Lee County Soil and Water Conservation District.



This educational activity has proved to be a huge success, states Jodie Lahman, Education Coordinator for Lee County Soil and Water Conservation District. It provides a great opportunity to reinforce the importance of conserving our natural resources and why being good stewards of the environment is so important, not just to us as humans, but to our wildlife as well.

Rave reviews from educators include: You did an excellent job offering the students a variety of topics. Thank you for an organized, education activity so close to home. Thank you so much for putting together such a terrific day of outdoor education.



The Lee and Ogle County Soil and Water Conservation Districts would like to express their sincere thanks to all of those who volunteered their time to present and assist with the activities. Without your participation the event would not have been such a great SUCCESS!!! THANKS!!!



## Argentinean Farmers Visit Douglas County

On September 29, Douglas County DC, Ben Mingo, and RC, Butch Fisher, met with a group of farmers and businesspersons from Argentina. The group was visiting the farm of Eric Rund, northeast of Tuscola. Butch and Ben explained the purpose and function of the cross-slot planter to the 30 visitors. After leaving the Rund farm, the Argentineans toured ADM in Decatur, the University of Illinois farms, the Board of Trade in Chicago and the Farm Progress Show in Sangamon County.



Argentinean farmers viewing a planter in Douglas County

## Fall Vineyard Tour

WIGPAC (Western Illinois Grape Producers Associated Corporation) held its second vineyard tour on September 9, 2000. Over 125 people attended from Illinois and surrounding states. The Tour started in Pittsfield and included three vineyards in Pike County and one in Calhoun County.



Imid Dami, State Viticulturist (above) discussed some of his test plots at the Rolling Hills Vineyard. WIGPAC members have been actively researching various varieties, fertilizers, trellis systems, and other aspects of grape production. Grapes usually are not harvested until a vine is at least three years old, however, a new product appears to allow two year old plants to be harvested with no adverse effects on the later life of the vine.

WIGPAC's purchasing agent, who operates Bay Creek Vineyard, posted prices on all of the supplies and materials that he had put in use. They also showed everyone a new batch of homemade wine that was fermenting.

Bellevue Hollow Vineyard featured test plots for Nortrace and UAP-Richter. Dr. John Pickle spoke about ACA test plots. Several vendors were present selling Vineyard products.

The research being done by some of the WIGPAC members is being followed and replicated worldwide and next year's tour may include representatives from several different countries.



Another technique being experimented with is the direct planting of un-rooted cuttings directly into the vineyard. Grow-tubes (shown above), a watering system, and a fertilization program are being used here. Conventionally, grapes are started in a garden or greenhouse before being planted in the final location as two-year-old plants.



Dr. James F. Nickell (above), WIGPAC president, from Calhoun County showed tour members part of the 22 acres he has planted to wine grapes this spring. Jim is legally blind, but keeps up a pace that few can follow. The tour was concluded with a wine tasting by Alto Vineyards from Alto Pass, Illinois.

Two Rivers RC&D at Pittsfield has assisted the cooperative for a little over two years. This dedicated group has met at least monthly during that time, said RC&D Coordinator Martha Sheppard. Cooperative Specialist Mike Doherty, USDA Rural Development Agency, has led



the seven grape growers through the steps necessary to form a successful cooperative. Kyle Harfst of SIU's Community and Business Services has also assisted by developing a fill-in-the-blank business plan for grape growers. For more information on WIGPAC and services available to grape growers in Illinois, contact Martha Sheppard at Two Rivers RC&D at (217)285-4114 or by email: [martha.sheppard@il.usda.gov](mailto:martha.sheppard@il.usda.gov)

## The Second Time Around

Submitted by: Carzella C. Pritchett  
Outreach Coordinator, FOD 2

Charles Phillips and his wife had no prior knowledge of the technical assistance available through the Natural Resource Conservation Service. However, they did possess a desire to own a small farm. Their first priority was to purchase a *residential farm* that could later be converted into a *retirement farm* to augment their income.

They were eventually fortunate enough to purchase a small farm that straddles the counties of Coles and Cumberland. The topography is very diverse and picturesque, with a forested setting surrounded by cropland fields that overlook Hurricane Creek.

After learning of their conservation desires, a neighbor and longtime program (USDA) participant directed the couple to the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service office in Charleston. Andy Cerven, District Conservationist, provided the couple resource information and explained methods of addressing their erosion concerns. In addition, soils data was reviewed for the construction of a house. A natural spring was also located on the property, which was helpful in deciding placement of the home. After meeting with the NRCS staff, the couple followed NRCS recommendations for a sediment/retention basin for erosion control.

The Phillips are planning to establish a truck farm business in the near future, which will be called Grits & Grocery. It will include a seasonal farm stand operating on the Charleston town square.

The Phillips are one of the many small farm families that are considering the

production of specialty crops as an alternative to the traditional corn and soybean crop rotations. Thanks to the help of the Charleston Field Office staff, the Phillips now have the support that they need to succeed.

## 200 Students Participate in Outdoor Education Program



Student analyzing a soil sample

On October 17, 2000 more than 200 Rock Island and Henry County students in third through sixth grades participated in an Outdoor Nature Education program held at Loud Thunder Forest Preserve.

This pilot program is designed to help young students learn more soils and forestry management in an outdoor setting. The forestry component consisted of tree identification using a trail with native species; timber stand improvement, proper tree planting techniques, forest watch ecosystem monitoring. The students hiked along a trail to inspect the variety of leaves and tree species. Each student was also able to plant a white oak tree seedling and then each class planted a larger white oak tree. The students were also able to see the process of a tree being cut down, sawed for lumber and the process of lumber to



Future scientists at work

furniture. The soils component consisted of a demonstration of a soil sample being taken by a probe truck, and viewing a soil theater to see a soil profile in a natural setting. Each student built their own soil monolith using a 1 x8 plastic tube to create 3 different horizons of soil. The students really enjoyed this station because they

were able to take home a sample with them. The students also participated in soil property where they were able to determine the texture, color and pH of the soil.

This education program is sponsored by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Interstate Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D), Rock Island County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), University of Illinois Extension of Rock Island County, Rock Island County Regional Office of Education, Rock Island County Board's Forest Preserve Committee and Bi-State Regional Planning Commission.

## Conferences

March 21-23, 2001

Small Farms A Renewed Opportunity  
North Central Region SARE Springfield, IL.  
Contact: Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant  
(217) 968-5512

March 17, 2001

Midwest Pasture Poultry Workshop  
Herscher, IL (Kankakee County)  
Contact: Merrill D. Marxman  
(815) 937-3233 Ext. 2

March 3 - 4, 2001

Michigan Organic Conference  
MSU, East Lansing, Michigan  
Contact: Christine Lietzau, Michigan  
Department of Agriculture  
Email: lietzauc@state.mi.us or Phone:  
(517)-373-9800.

April 3rd and 5th, 2001

Sustainable Approaches to Aquaculture  
Production & Marketing  
Ottawa, IL (3<sup>rd</sup>) & Effingham, IL (5<sup>th</sup>).  
Contact: John Glover  
(309) 452-2492 Ext. 112

## Make A Connection!

Get NRCS products and services  
into the hands of ALL  
who need them!

## Who Do I Call With Outreach Questions?

John Glover

State Outreach Coordinator  
309-452-0830 Ext. 112

Bruce Bennett

Asst. State Conservationist (FOD 1)  
618-993-5396 Ext. 110

Steve Mozley

Asst. State Conservationist (FOD 2)  
217-492-5045

Tessa Chadwick

Asst. State Conservationist (FOD 3)  
815-937-3233 x114

Bob Dean

Asst. State Conservationist (FOD 4)  
309-342-5138 x115

Lue Walters

Asst. State Conservationist  
(Community Assistance)  
309-452-0830 x111

Jody Rendziak

Community Planner & Sociologist  
217-353-6632

## Internet Connections

### Outreach Website

An Illinois outreach website has been established to provide resource information. The site provides general outreach information on developing an outreach strategy and it has links to other agencies, possible funding sources, and other valuable information. The Illinois NRCS outreach website can be accessed at:

[www.il.nrcs.usda.gov/outreach/Outreach.html](http://www.il.nrcs.usda.gov/outreach/Outreach.html)

### Grant Info On-Line

Grant News, a grant listing newsletter produced by the Illinois State University Applied Social Research Unit is now available on-line. The newsletter lists grant opportunities available from various private and public sources. Grant News can be accessed at:

[www.socialresearch.ilstu.edu/asru/publications.htm](http://www.socialresearch.ilstu.edu/asru/publications.htm)

If you have an outreach related article, story idea, or success story to share, please send it to:

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